

The First Dwelling Places

Chapter 1 (summary)

Interior Castle

by Saint Teresa of Avila

Discusses the beauty and dignity of our souls.

Draws a comparison in order to explain, and speaks of the benefit that comes from understanding this truth and knowing about the favors we receive from God and how the door to this castle is prayer.

Today while beseeching our Lord to speak for me because I wasn't able to think of anything to say nor did I know how to carry out this **obedience** ... there came to my mind ... that we consider our **soul** to be like a **castle** made entirely out of a **diamond** or a very clear **crystal**, in which there are **many rooms**, just as in **heaven** there are many **dwelling place** ... We realize, Sisters, that the soul of the **just person** is nothing else but a **paradise** where the Lord says he finds His delight. So then, what do you think that abode will be like where a King ... so full of all good things takes his delight? I don't find anything comparable to the magnificent beauty of a soul ...

... If this is true ... there is no reason to tire ourselves in trying to comprehend the beauty of this castle ... the soul is made in His own image making it almost impossible for us to understand its sublime dignity and beauty.

2. It is a shame ... that through our own fault we don't understand ourselves or know who we are. Wouldn't it show great ignorance, my daughters, if someone ... didn't know his father or mother or what country he came from? ... If this would be so stupid, we are even more so when we do not strive to know **who we are** ... Because we have ... faith ... we know we have souls. But, we seldom consider ... who dwells within it, or its high value and so little effort is made to preserve its beauty. All our

attention is taken up ... with the outer wall of the castle; that is with these bodies of ours.

3. Let's consider that this castle has **many dwelling places**: some up above, others down below, others to the sides; and in the **center** and **middle** is the **main dwelling place** where the very **secret exchanges** between **God** and the **soul** take place.

... Keep this comparison in mind. Perhaps God ... will let me use it to explain something ... about the **favors** He grants souls and the **difference** between these favors ... It will be a great **consolation** when the Lord grants them to you if you know they are possible; and for anyone to whom he doesn't, it will be a consolation to praise Him ... It doesn't do us any harm to see that it is possible in this exile for so great a God to commune with such foul-smelling worms ... I hold as certain that anyone who might be harmed by knowing that God can grant this favor in this exile ... is **lacking in humility** and **love of neighbor**.

4. These favors seem to be impossible ... Those to whom God grants these favors though will be delighted and awakened through them to a greater love of Him ... Yet, I know I am speaking to those ... who know and believe that God grants even greater **signs of His love**. I know that whoever does not believe in these favors will have **no experience** of them, for God doesn't like us to put a **limit** on His works. And so, Sisters, those of you whom the Lord doesn't lead by this path should never doubt His generosity.

5. Getting back to our beautiful and delightful **castle**, we must see how we can **enter** it. It seems I'm saying something foolish. For if this **castle is the soul** ... one doesn't have to enter it since it is within oneself ... You must understand that there is a great **difference** in the ways one may be inside the castle. There are many souls in the

outer courtyard ... and who don't care about entering the castle.

6. ... A very learned man told me that souls who **do not practice prayer** are like people with paralyzed or crippled bodies ... There are souls so ill and so accustomed to being involved in **external matters** that there is no remedy, nor does it seem they can enter within themselves ... so used are they to dealing with the **insects** and **vermin** (or worldly things) in the wall surrounding the castle that they are almost like them ... If these souls do not strive to ... cure their **great misery**, they will be changed into **statues of salt** ... unable to look at themselves, just as Lot's wife...

7. Insofar as I can understand, **the door of entry** to this castle is **prayer** and **reflection**.

I don't mean to refer to mental more than vocal prayer, since **vocal prayer** must be accompanied by **reflection**. A prayer in which a person is not aware whom he is speaking to, what he is asking, who it is who is asking and of whom, I do not call that prayer however much the lips move ...

Among yourselves, Sisters ... the custom you have of being occupied with interior things is quite a good safeguard against ... carrying on this way like brute beasts.

8. ... We are speaking to souls that, in the end, enter the **castle**. For though they are involved in the world, they have good desires and sometimes ... they entrust themselves to our Lord and reflect on who they are ... During a month, they will sometimes pray, but their **minds** are then filled with **business matters** ... They are so **attached** to these things ... Sometimes they do put all these things aside, and have the **self-knowledge** and **awareness** ... that they are not proceeding correctly to get to the **door**. Finally, they enter the lower rooms. But so many **reptiles** (or worldly attachments) get in with them that they are prevented from seeing the beauty of the

castle and from calming down. They have done quite a bit by having entered.

Amen